

TO: County Council President Glass and Council Members

FROM: Mary Reardon, representing Silver Spring Historical Society

RE: Testimony re Master Plan Addition of Weller's Dry Cleaning

Before County Council

Date: April 25, 2023

Good afternoon.

My name is Mary Reardon, and I'm representing the Silver Spring Historical Society. Our President is submitting a *written* statement.

Silver Spring Historical Society enthusiastically joins with other preservation groups and experts – and the Historic Preservation Commission - in affirming that the Weller's Dry Cleaning building and sign are eligible for listing on the County Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

It's important to remind Council members what propelled this process. County planners, in the recently approved Silver Spring sector plan, *singled out* Weller's to be studied for potential listing on the Master Plan. The Historic Preservation staff promptly set this recommendation in motion.

My point is that the Historic Preservation Commission was not prompted by an immigrant family's purchase of this property, as some of our opponents have claimed – a preposterous accusation against Commissioners and staff and an example of the hostility directed at preservationists.

I have often been awed by the Weller's building. I was fascinated with its mixture of construction materials, colorful striped panels, and the bright geometric shapes of the sign – even before I learned about an architectural style called Googie.

The label “Googie” itself is another tool of hostility by opponents of designation. They've implied that unfamiliarity with the term means the style is not a serious architectural category. As if unfamiliarity with the term “Prairie Style” would delegitimize the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Preservationists have long valued the small independent businesses in Silver Spring's Fenton Village, particularly their ethnic diversity. During the sector plan work sessions, preservationists urged that Fenton Village's small businesses and moderate-scale, affordable buildings like Weller's be preserved.

Weller's long history of service in Fenton Village was begun, interestingly, by sons of Lithuanian immigrants. Weller's familiar, unique design, and its embodiment of the Googie

style, meet two legal criteria for historic designation - affirmed by the HPC (yet barely touched on by the three Planning Board opponents of designation).

We are aware that the Weller's owner considers designation incompatible with the family's plans for this site and her other properties, and that she is frustrated in encountering County regulations on preservation and also on environmental remediation requirements. But government regulations are part of the cost of doing business. And with its colorful elements restored, the unique features of Weller's could attract customers to businesses located there or provide a stunning entrance to a future housing or commercial structure. Moreover, demolition would involve environmental remediation costs at this former dry cleaning site.

The new occupant of the building has retained the structural elements of the Weller's building sign. The inverted triangle element contains text in Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia. So this new business contributes to the medley of cultures that is a pride of Fenton Village.

To conclude, Silver Spring Historical Society strongly urges the Council to list the Weller's building and sign on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation.

Mary Reardon, 2236 Washington Ave., 101, Silver Spring 20910 240-535-5200